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ABSTRACT

To help students learn peaceful conflict resolution, the Comprehensive Conflict Resolution Program was initiated. This report analyzes that effort. The program established peer mediation centers in high schools and developed a pilot course or core unit on collaborative negotiation. The program's development and inception are presented in this report in four chapters. Chapter 1 gives the background of the program, program goals, and the evaluation focus and methodology which were used to judge the program. Program implementation is discussed in chapter 2, with major findings appearing in chapter 3. Chapter 4 offers conclusions and recommendations. During the first year, efforts focused largely on training staff and providing on-site support via a conflict resolution coordinator. Each high school selected and trained a cadre of students as mediators who, under adult supervision, mediated disputes involving their peers. Evaluation of the program found that schools made substantial progress in implementing the program. School administrators and program specialists noted positive changes in the attitudes and behavior of school staff and students, along with other improvements. For the second year, program efforts centered on helping schools deal more effectively with conflict by increasing their sense of program ownership and independence through continued training. (RJM)

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# OER Report

## COMPREHENSIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION TRAINING PROGRAM 1993-94

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In order to help students learn how to resolve conflicts peacefully, the Division of High Schools (D.H.S.) of the Board of Education of the City of New York, through its Office of Guidance Support Services (O.G.S.S.), initiated the Comprehensive Conflict Resolution program (C.C.R.T.) in all public high schools in 1992-93. The program's major objectives during its first year of operation were to establish a peer mediation center in each high school and to develop a pilot course or core unit on cooperative negotiation. The 1992-93 evaluation of the program by the Office of Educational Research (OER)--then the Office of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment--found that schools had made substantial progress in implementing the program. Mediation centers had been established in most high schools and peer mediators had begun to mediate disputes; and in nearly all schools, lessons on cooperative negotiation had been developed and taught to some students. In addition, there was evidence on the part of both school staff and students of a growing respect for mediation as a vehicle for resolving conflicts and the development of valuable mediation/negotiation skills.

During the 1993-94 school year, program efforts were directed at continuing to help schools develop a building-level capacity to deal more effectively with conflict, aimed largely at increasing their sense of program ownership and independence in managing the program. Accordingly, training activities were intended both to provide ongoing support to individuals first involved with the program in 1992-93, and to engage other members of the school community whose participation was considered important to the institutionalization of its basic principles of cooperative negotiation and dispute resolution.

The findings from the 1993-94 evaluation of the C.C.R.T. program by OER indicated that training in conflict resolution had been extended to many groups of people within the school community--including additional or replacement specialists, classroom teachers, assistant principals of guidance, deans, security guards, and parents--and that ongoing assistance had been provided to the those first trained during 1992-93. Responsibility for this training and support was assumed largely by the conflict resolution coordinators (C.R.C.s) from each superintendency under the direction of O.G.S.S. Importantly, however, they saw themselves as "educational facilitators," and encouraged school staff to initiate their own staff development activities and student participation in training and promotional activities. Training and supervision of the peer mediators, primarily the responsibility of the mediation specialists, were also going well, although scheduling continued to be a major obstacle.

There was considerable evidence of the use of peer mediation as a means of resolving disputes, and various kinds of conflicts --with the exception of those involving weapons, drugs, or physically injury--were mediated. For the most part, the disputes were between individual students or groups of students, although some did involve students and school staff, students and parents/guardians and, to a limited extent, school staff. Self-referrals on the part of students, disputants' belief that their mediation experience was valuable, and interest in conflict resolution training on the part of staff responsible for school discipline, all point to an evolving commitment on the part of school staff and students to the mediation process. Nevertheless, there were important differences in how the mediation centers operated and to what extent. Generally, those with separate, well-equipped space that afforded a sense of privacy and student ownership fared best.

Most schools had succeeded in providing instruction in cooperative negotiation to various student populations which incorporated lessons on multiculturalism and cultural diversity, and which afforded students an opportunity to practice what they were learning about peaceful approaches to resolving conflicts. According to some C.R.C.s, this program component continued to be difficult to implement, in part because it entails changing the way people think.

All program participants believed that the program has had a positive impact on personal relationships and school climate, overall. Cited were improvements in the way students deal with anger and resolve conflicts, heightened respect for differences, better communication skills, and increased understanding of students' needs on the part of school staff. Some people noted that the school atmosphere was calmer and more collaborative.

Several findings suggested that schools were developing a sense of program ownership and the capacity to manage it more independently. These included the increased level of support for conflict resolution on the part of administrators and staff, greater "buy-in" on the part of students, heightened interest in conflict resolution training on the part of various school personnel, and the involvement of the peer mediators in the training of adults and other students. However, not all schools exhibited the same level of progress and, according to the C.R.C.s, even those that had made considerable progress toward self-management needed to be "nurtured, rewarded, and supported."

Based on the findings presented in this report, OER makes the following recommendations:

- Efforts to provide mediation and cooperative negotiation training to more members of the school community should be continued in order to promote the effective use of conflict resolution strategies in a wider variety of personal interactions and relationships.

- Staff development in the integration of conflict resolution concepts into subject-area instruction should be extended to as many teachers as possible, as a way of reinforcing the underlying principles and, perhaps, enlivening academic topics by engaging students more emotionally in the educational process.

- Activities directed at publicizing and promoting conflict resolution should continue to involve the specialists, peer mediators, and disputants, but also extend the opportunity to other staff and students as a way of promoting their sense of involvement in the program--an enterprise directed at positive change.

- Principals should continue to support the program actively--e.g., by encouraging students and staff to use mediation as a means of solving conflict, facilitating attendance at mediation and negotiation training activities, securing private space for the mediation center, exploring creative solutions to scheduling and programming problems, and otherwise facilitating its operation.

- Efforts directed at encouraging cooperation between schools and the larger community--e.g., law enforcement officials, health agencies, and local businesses--to promote the prevention of violence should, to the extent possible, be expanded.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was prepared by the High School Evaluation Unit of the Office of Educational Research of the Board of Education of the City of New York under the direction of Dr. Lori Mei. Judith Eisler, evaluation associate, was the project manager and principal author, responsible for the evaluation design, instrument development, data analysis, and report writing. Dr. Ellen Schnepel, evaluation consultant, conducted site visits and interviews, and assisted with instrument development and data analysis. Evaluation consultants Mattie Bialer and Dr. Peggy Lane also interviewed program participants.

Additional copies of this report are available by writing to:

Dr. Lori Mei
Office of Educational Research
110 Livingston Street, Rm. 740
Brooklyn, New York 11201

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

In response to the escalation of violence among adolescents in recent years, the Division of High Schools (D.H.S.) of the Board of Education of the City of New York, through its Office of Guidance Support Services (O.G.S.S.), initiated the Comprehensive Conflict Resolution Training program (C.C.R.T.) in all public high schools during 1992-93 to help students learn how to solve conflicts peacefully. To this end, the program aimed to establish peer mediation centers and pilot a course or core unit on collaborative negotiation. During the first year, efforts focused largely on training school staff--a negotiation specialist and a mediation specialist--to implement the program, and providing on-site support via a conflict resolution coordinator (C.R.C.) assigned to each superintendency. In addition, each high school selected and trained a cadre of students as mediators who, under adult supervision, would mediate disputes involving their peers. Principals also received training designed to acquaint them with conflict resolution concepts and strategies to better enable them to support the program in their schools.

The 1992-93 evaluation of the C.C.R.T. program by the Office of Educational Research (OER)--then the Office of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment--found that schools made substantial progress in implementing the program--i.e., mediation centers were established in most high schools and peer mediators had

begun to mediate disputes; and nearly all negotiation specialists had developed and taught lessons on cooperative negotiation to some students in their schools. School administrators and program specialists noted positive changes in the attitudes and behavior of school staff and students, a growing respect for mediation as a vehicle for resolving conflicts, and the development of valuable mediation/negotiation skills. While there was considerable support for the program within the larger school community, some individuals did not subscribe to mediation as an approach to resolving conflicts, and others were reluctant to release students for conflict resolution activities because they interfered with instructional time. Program participants generally agreed that additional training, time, and resources were necessary to more fully and effectively integrate the program into the culture of the school.

MAJOR GOALS IN 1993-94

Program efforts during 1993-94 were directed at continuing to help schools develop a building-level capacity to deal more effectively with conflict, aimed largely at increasing their sense of program ownership and independence in sustaining the momentum generated in 1992-93. Accordingly, training activities were designed both to provide ongoing support to individuals first involved with the program in 1992-93 (mediation and negotiation specialists and peer mediators) and to engage others whose participation was considered important to the institutionalization of the program's basic principles of

cooperative negotiation and dispute resolution. This included assistant principals, other school staff, replacement specialists, parents, and staff of the area superintendencies, as well as a greater cross-section of students. Those already trained in the program's concepts and strategies were expected to assume major responsibility for training others, both as a way of expanding their own skills and ensuring that the leadership necessary to perpetuate the program evolves within the school community. By extending the community of people who use cooperative negotiation principles in their interactions with others, program staff hoped that students would have positive role models and greater opportunities to resolve differences peacefully.

PROJECT EVALUATION AND METHODOLOGY

The 1993-94 evaluation by OER focused on documenting schools' use of mediation to resolve disputes and teaching of cooperative negotiation, participants' assessment of the program's effect on personal interactions within and outside the school, and schools' progress toward self-management of the program.

Evaluation methodology included two mail surveys to all high schools: Survey 1 requested descriptive information about the operation of the mediation center and instruction offered in negotiation, as well as quantitative data related to the fall 1993 semester; Survey 2 asked participants' for their assessment of the program and its impact on conflict management and school

climate, in addition to quantitative data for the spring 1994 semester. OER staff also conducted interviews with a sample of specialists and students--peer mediators, disputants, and students who received lessons in the negotiation curriculum--in five schools (in different superintendencies), and with all of the C.R.C.s.

SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

The background of the program, goals for the 1993-94 school year, and the evaluation focus and methodology are described in Chapter I. Program implementation is discussed in Chapter II and major findings presented in Chapter III. Chapter IV offers conclusions and recommendations.

## II. PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

### DESCRIPTION OF RESPONDENTS

The findings reported here are based on two mail surveys to high schools,* interviews with the Conflict Resolution Coordinators (C.R.C.s) in each superintendency, and interviews with project participants in a sample of five schools including 16 peer mediators, 13 students who participated in peer mediations as disputants, 11 students who received lessons on cooperative negotiation (hereafter called curriculum students), and five conflict resolution specialists (four mediation specialists and one negotiation specialist).

### MEDIATION

#### School History

About half of the 82 schools that completed Survey 1 reported that mediation services of any kind had been used in their school for more than two years as a means of dealing with conflict; only one percent indicated (at the end of the fall 1993 semester) that mediation services were not yet available. In addition, about one-quarter of the schools reported that a community-based organization (C.B.O.) or other mediation program

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*A total of 82 high schools returned Survey 1, which asked about the operation of the mediation center and the instruction offered in cooperative negotiation in general, as well as specific information regarding project implementation during fall 1993; Survey 2, completed by 117 schools, requested quantitative data for the spring 1994 semester, and schools' assessment of the program and its impact on conflict management. The quantitative data related to fall 1993 were summarized in a report of preliminary findings issued in August 1994.

had been functioning in their school prior to the D.H.S. conflict resolution program, but in only one school did the D.H.S. program replace the C.B.O. program--i.e., in most schools both programs continued to operate, dividing responsibility for cases or in other ways coordinating their efforts.

Space

Close to two-thirds of the schools reported that a separate room had been designated for the mediation center; other arrangements included rotating locations depending on space availability, and sharing permanent space with other school activities. In rating the adequacy of the space in their schools, respondents were fairly evenly divided, with about half (51 percent) saying it was "very adequate" and the rest saying it was "moderately adequate" (42 percent) or "not at all adequate" (7 percent).

In assessing the adequacy of the space for mediation purposes, respondents' were concerned primarily with size and privacy, and to a lesser extent with how well equipped it was and its location. Commenting on the need for privacy, respondents stressed the importance of ensuring the confidentiality that is crucial to the mediation process. The designation of a separate room expressly for mediation not only afforded the necessary privacy but had other advantages--e.g., mediations could take place without interruption, the room could be used for conflict resolution training and for more informal discussions among students when mediations were not in session.

In fact, most respondents (78 percent) said that students in their school do use the mediation center for purposes other than the mediation of disputes--e.g., to deal with a problem with a parent or another student before it escalates into a major conflict, to vent their anger or grief over the death of a peer during a violent altercation, or "just to rap" with others about issues of concern such as career goals, academic problems, domestic violence, teen sex, racism, and substance abuse. Noted by most of those respondents who said that the mediation center was used for such purposes was the importance of students having a place in the school where they feel comfortable in sharing their ideas and feelings with each other and with adults. Elaborating on the opportunity for such interactions afforded by the mediation center, one respondent commented on students' need for "nonjudgmental adult feedback on issues they have to deal with as they approach adulthood"; another cited the "natural peer interaction that builds trust." A room dedicated solely to mediation, especially if it was well located, also made mediation services more visible and accessible.

The few respondents who explained why the mediation room was not used by students as a place simply to come and talk about issues of interest generally cited logistical reasons--e.g., lack of a permanent site or no personnel to keep the center open when there were no mediations in session. Several individuals said that opportunities for students to discuss problems were provided by other school staff or programs.

## Description of Peer Mediators and Selection Criteria

The peer mediators, most of whom were female, were recruited from all grade levels, although grades 10 and 11 were represented slightly more than grades 9 and 12. In selecting peer mediators, schools utilized various criteria--foremost of which was leadership (cited by 94 percent). Other criteria included mediation skills displayed during negotiation lessons (55 percent), bilingual ability (54 percent), ethnicity/race (52 percent), gender (42 percent), academic record (39 percent), and middle school mediation training experience (37 percent). Student interest/motivation, recommendations from others (including school staff, parents, and peer mediators), and past experience as a disputant were other factors considered in the selection of student mediators. The "buy-in" by students who have participated in the mediation process, implicit in their interest in becoming mediators, is encouraging evidence of the value of peer mediation as a vehicle for solving school-based conflict.

## Peer Mediators' Perceptions of Their Role

In explaining how they perceived their role as a mediator, students talked largely about helping other students to solve conflicts--specifically, by listening, remaining neutral, being open to other people's views, helping people to understand each other, being patient and, as one student expressed it, "to listen and project a friendly atmosphere...[but] not impose ideas." Several students emphasized the importance of their status as

students: "People will speak to me kid-to-kid, which is better than talking to adults"; "kids do listen to kids more"; "a kid will trust me more"; and "[I am] someone their age who understands them." Some students also commented on their obligation to serve as role models: "Mostly to be like an example and show them that we can solve problems"; and "I have to present myself respectfully and try not to get into fights."

Mediation Specialists

In describing their program-related responsibilities this year, the mediation specialists talked about training the peer mediators, coordinating and conducting mediations (occasionally including disputes between students and teachers), and engaging in various activities directed at promoting conflict resolution. (Not all of the mediation specialists, however, assumed all of these responsibilities, and one also reported training other school staff.)

The amount of school time the specialists devoted to conflict resolution activities ranged from 75-100 percent, although some found it difficult to be precise--either because they spent more time than was "officially" allocated, or because their program and regular school responsibilities overlapped--e.g., dealing with student discipline.

Operation of Mediation Center

Hours of operation. On average, the mediation centers were open for 15.7 hours a week. However, this varied from 0-40 hours among schools, and nearly half (46 percent) reported ten or fewer hours.

Kinds of conflicts mediated. Various kinds of conflicts were mediated. These included disputes involving reputation or gossip (reported by 91 percent of responding schools), disrespect or name-calling (90 percent), boyfriend/girlfriend (85 percent), and racial/ethnic conflicts (45 percent). Generally, conflicts involving physical violence or injury, illegal acts such as weapons or drugs were not considered appropriate for mediation. During the spring 1994 semester, an average of 49.1 cases were mediated (although the number ranged from 1 to 240 across all schools.)

Groups involved in mediated disputes. Most schools reported that the conflicts that were mediated involved individual students (98 percent) and groups of students (78 percent); other conflicts involved students and school staff (reported by 48 percent of the schools), students and parents/guardians (22 percent) and, to a limited extent, disputes between school staff (18 percent). On average, a majority (62 percent) of the students who had been trained as peer mediators actually had the opportunity to mediate a dispute during the spring 1994 semester. (Only four percent of the schools reported that none of the

students had mediated any cases; 19 percent said that all of them had done so.)

Referral to mediation. Student disputants described how they came to use peer mediation as a way of dealing with conflicts: several came on their own, two were told to go to the center by an adult in the school (in one case because the principal had witnessed a verbal conflict between two students and wanted to prevent it from escalating into a fight), and some came at the suggestion of others in the school--e.g., a peer mediator, the other disputant involved in the argument, or a staff member. Interestingly, two students said that they had "faked a problem" in order to come to the center, explaining that they wanted to be like their other friends who had participated in a mediation.

Criteria for assigning mediators to cases. Asked how the peer mediators were assigned to hear particular cases, most respondents cited scheduling availability (88 percent), experience mediating similar cases (73 percent), bilingual ability (70 percent), and gender (55 percent); fewer respondents mentioned ethnic/racial background (34 percent) and age (32 percent). Interestingly, there was considerable variation in the ways in which these criteria were used. For example, in some cases efforts were made to match peer mediators and disputants on the basis of age, gender, or ethnicity, while in other instances mediators of the opposite gender or different ethnic background or age were selected. Two comments are illustrative:

- "[In] cases that involve two females we will use a female [mediator], and the same with males. We try to keep the right ethnic mix and other guidelines to allow as much comfort to disputants as possible."

- "I like girls to mediate between two boys and boys to mediate between two girls; they seem to be better behaved in front of the opposite sex."

Also considered were personal attributes and skills, such as students' maturity, sensitivity to particular issues, the ability to establish discipline or a sense of trust, or to remain impartial. Some respondents believed that students acquired these qualities by virtue of their mediation experience; others voiced the opinion that some individuals have an "inherent gift" and are "natural reconcilers" irrespective of their gender, age, or ethnicity. As one respondent put it, "Some mediators have more forceful personalities and can establish order earlier than others. We use these mediators if it seems that the case could become volatile."

Clearly, decisions regarding the assignment of peer mediators to specific cases were based on a wide variety of factors, although scheduling was typically the dominant factor.

Disposition of cases. Apart from crisis situations, most conflicts were mediated the same day or the next day (reported by 78 percent of schools), or within a week (20 percent). The vast majority of schools (98 and 96 percent, respectively) reported that mediations resulted in written or verbal agreements, and that the disputants abided by their mediated settlements "most of the time." The student disputants who were interviewed by OER confirmed these findings.

Conflicts were mediated in various ways--by an adult mediator alone, student co-mediators, an adult and student mediating a case together, and by a student mediator alone.

Disputes that were not successfully mediated were handled in various ways depending upon the nature and severity of the conflict. These included mediating the case again, often with a change of mediator or a "cooling-off" period; referral to another individual in the school such as the dean, guidance counselor, SPARK counselor, principal or assistant principal; conference with parents; suspension or pre-suspension hearing; or referral to an outside agency.

Disputants' descriptions of mediation experiences. Students' descriptions of what actually happened when they went to mediation to resolve a conflict are suggestive of those aspects of the experience that were meaningful to them. They commented, for example, on the fact that everyone involved in the dispute had a chance to tell their side of the story, that there were rules that had to be followed as part of the process of resolving conflict (e.g., "no insulting each other"), that what they shared was confidential, and that the peer mediators "didn't take sides."

Apart from these recollections of the process, students also noted some important outcomes, which included seeing what the conflict was about in a different way than they had before participating in mediation, learning that the real issue underlying a conflict can be different from what it appears to

be--e.g., "I found out that it is deeper than what the person says it's about," and not only resolving a conflict peacefully but having a say in how it is resolved--e.g., "spelling out our agreement."

## NEGOTIATION

### Roles and Responsibilities of Specialists

The negotiation specialists reported being involved in a variety of activities in addition to teaching conflict resolution, aimed primarily at heightening other people's awareness of the program and related issues. Students typically participated in these as speakers or co-presenters, sometimes in collaboration with other community organizations such as the Antidefamation League and the National Conference of Christians and Jews. Examples include a boroughwide conference for high school students, parents, principals, and district superintendents' representatives; a workshop for special education students; and a panel discussion for Peace Day on "Violence, Values, and Teenagers." The negotiation specialist also helped to organize an after-school club and accompanied students to Broadway performances of plays about diversity.

### Instructional Goals and Accomplishments

Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of the schools said that their goal was for all students ultimately to receive instruction in cooperative negotiation; as of March 1993, most schools reported that instruction had been provided to ninth and tenth grade students (83 and 70 percent, respectively), and about half

had provided instruction to students in the eleventh and twelfth grades (50 and 45 percent, respectively). On average, schools reported that during the spring 1994 semester, 29 percent of all students received instruction in negotiation. (Six percent said that all students had received instruction, while two percent said that no instruction had been given during this time.) The mean number of lessons for those students who received them was 12, although the number ranged from one to 90. The mean number of negotiation specialists and other school staff who taught these lessons on cooperative negotiation during the spring 1994 was 3.9, although most schools reported that one or two individuals assumed this responsibility (51 percent and 22 percent, respectively). For most schools, this represented between one and two percent of all teachers.

Approach to Instruction

Slightly more than half (56 percent) of the respondents said that negotiation lessons are integrated into subject-area instruction. These included a wide variety of curriculum areas. Some respondents noted that history and social studies (and related subjects like government and law) lend themselves readily to teaching negotiation because of the natural tie-in between historical events and concepts of conflict resolution; others observed that English is also well suited to the integration of cooperative negotiation because of its emphasis on communication skills and the exploration of conflict and values through literary analysis. Classes in leadership, guidance, family

group, and health, similarly lent themselves to discussions of values and interpersonal relationships. However, the subject area in which cooperative negotiation was taught appeared to depend largely on the particular curriculum area taught by the negotiation specialist.

When negotiation lessons were not integrated into subject-area instruction, they were generally taught as a separate course or mini-course, or as a unit of another course.

In order to understand more specifically what schools were actually teaching in the cooperative negotiation curriculum, one survey item asked respondents to describe the topics that were emphasized. Although a multitude of topics were listed, they comprise four major categories: 1) understanding the nature of conflict; 2) effective communication; 3) values and concepts; and 4) strategies for resolving conflict and alternatives to violence. Lessons on understanding conflict included defining conflict and the roots of conflict, transforming negative conflict into positive conflict, and understanding and handling anger. Lessons on communication included active listening, reframing issues, perception, body language, critical thinking, and understanding feelings. Lessons on values and concepts explored tolerance, acceptance, stereotyping, enhancement of self-esteem, cultural diversity, and peer pressure. Covered in conflict resolution strategies were elements of negotiation, management of anger, and differences among conflict resolution

techniques (e.g., negotiation, mediation, arbitration, bargaining, and compromise).

Large majorities of respondents also indicated that lessons on cultural diversity or multiculturalism were incorporated into this instruction (89 percent), and that students were afforded opportunities to put into practice the conflict resolution strategies they were learning (95 percent). The latter consisted of a wide variety of activities aimed at reinforcing students' learning experiences, such as roleplaying (using skits, games, and student-generated scenarios) followed by discussion, analyses of controversial issues arising out of classroom instruction aimed at identifying common interests and resolving differences, mediations of actual school-based disagreements among students, and encouraging students to mediate conflicts outside of school or at home.

In describing some of the most noteworthy experiences in teaching the negotiation curriculum, the negotiation specialist who was interviewed talked about learning situations which afforded students opportunities to deal with issues about which they have strong feelings. These included class discussions or current events, and roleplays in which the student actors remained in character while other students questioned them about why they did or said what they did during the roleplay, or commented on their actions. The specialist described his role as helping students to recognize that "you can't love others until

you love yourself, and you can't change others until you change yourself."

PROGRAM SUPPORT TO SCHOOLS

Assistance from Conflict Resolution Coordinators

In view of the program's emphasis during 1993-94 on helping schools to become more independent in implementing the program and encouraging the institutionalization of cooperation negotiation, the efforts of the C.R.C.s, under the direction of O.G.S.S., focused largely on providing assistance to individuals involved in the program since its inception in 1992-93, and conducting training for other key members of the school community. Following is a summary of some of the major activities the C.R.C.s undertook in support of the program during the 1993-94 school year.

In both fall 1993 and spring 1994, they organized and conducted six days of training for a cohort of additional or replacement specialists modeled after the training provided by the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution at Teachers College during the program's first year of operation, but modified for school use. The C.R.C.s also reported making follow-up school visits and giving additional assistance as needed--e.g., troubleshooting, and providing written materials and videos. Two C.R.C.s specifically mentioned focusing more this year on helping teachers to infuse conflict resolution principles into classroom instruction.

The C.R.C.s also led a two-day citywide retreat for assistant principals for guidance. (Other administrative staff also attended from some schools.) The training aimed at giving school administrators a working knowledge of conflict resolution concepts and skills, and exploring ways in which they can best support cooperative conflict resolution in their schools.

In some superintendencies, the C.R.C.s met informally with principals of New Vision schools to acquaint them with the program and begin planning for its implementation next year. Staff of these schools were typically invited to conflict resolution activities designed for schools already participating in the program.

All C.R.C.s talked, too, about making on-site visits (in the case of multisite schools this entailed many new sites this year); speaking at staff and Parent Teachers Association meetings, and assembly programs; providing materials; and otherwise being available to help schools. Some commented specifically on efforts to involve segments of the school community not yet involved in the program in most schools, including social workers, psychologists, special education personnel, secretaries, security guards, and deans (whose traditional role as disciplinarians often incline them to reject mediation as an approach to school-based conflict).

Ongoing support to mediation and negotiation specialists trained during 1992-93 included regular meetings--to present new ideas and materials (e.g., curriculum manuals and training videos

for use with peer mediators), provide opportunities for networking, and to lend moral support.

One C.R.C., who characterized her role as providing "educational leadership," occasionally invited community organizations to make presentations at staff development meetings, such as a session on diversity by the Antidefamation League World of Difference Institute and the National Conference on Christians and Jews, and a workshop by speakers from Goldwater Hospital who have been paralyzed by acts of violence. She also encouraged schools to initiate their own staff development activities and facilitated student presentations on conflict resolution--e.g., for WNYE television, and for feeder school students and their parents. Another C.R.C. said that he cautioned schools where there were regular crises involving, for example, group violence, that they may be "leaning too heavily on the conflict resolution program." His efforts in these schools included helping them understand that some cases are not appropriate for peer mediation and that "successful case mediation evolves over time." "Peer mediation," he contended, "shouldn't be held to a higher standard than, for example, the dean's office."

In addition to assisting school-based staff, the C.R.C.s also reached out to various superintendency-level staff--e.g., regular and special education staff developers, personnel responsible for overseeing bilingual programs, and members of crisis response teams. Through workshops, informal discussions,

and consultations during crisis situations, their efforts were directed at demonstrating how the principles of cooperative negotiation could be used to deal with conflict and to avert violence.

Working collaboratively, the C.R.C.s also conducted a one-day citywide training conference (held in Manhattan) for parents "to let them know," as one C.R.C. explained, "that we're doing more that putting kids through metal detectors...[and] that there are options the schools are trying to create for dealing with violence." Another objective of the conference was to encourage parents to become involved with school conflict resolution activities--e.g., to attend training sessions so that they could co-mediate disputes and participate more effectively on school governance teams. One C.R.C. said that in addition to the citywide conference, she conducted a series of four other workshops for parents in her superintendency; another C.R.C. made monthly presentations at Parent Association meetings and encouraged parents to make conflict resolution part of the orientation for all new parents. (In Queens, the superintendent and parent liaison believed that parents would be reluctant to travel to Manhattan to attend a conference, and consequently planned to have a borough-based conference involving parents and students next year.)

The C.R.C.s also described some of the other program responsibilities they assumed this year. Several commented on working with students to use the arts--e.g., drama, poetry, and

music--to promote conflict resolution. One C.R.C. commented on the "interactive" play dealing with interracial dating written and performed by students for their own school, feeder schools, and parent groups. After presenting the play, students answered questions from the audience and did a mock mediation "in character." Such performances, he explained, offer student performers and audiences opportunities to explore nonviolent approaches to real-life problems. "Drama," he continued, "has a powerful emotional impact on adolescents and can be a catalyst for facilitating communication among young people of diverse backgrounds over issues with significant emotional impact....Most importantly, when kids are communicating to kids the message has real power."

Other program-related activities included creating opportunities for peer mediators to network with their counterparts via a Peer Mediators Advisory Council, providing additional training to selected students who will serve on school crisis response teams as prevention specialists, and starting a boroughwide newsletter celebrating the achievements of conflict resolution.

While the C.R.C.s commended the support and assistance they received from the D.H.S. and their individual superintendencies, they indicated the need for additional training (e.g., in violence prevention and crisis intervention, and interfacing with conflict resolution activities at the junior high school level) and for more funds to meet the instructional and training needs

of the schools (e.g., for books, videos, and speakers). Two C.R.C.s reported paying for additional training for themselves because project funds were not available.

TRAINING OF SCHOOL COMMUNITY

In view of the program's emphasis during 1993-94 on expanding the population of adults in students' lives who are conversant with the tenets of conflict resolution, one survey question asked what groups within the school community had received mediation or negotiation instruction during the school year. A majority of schools (65 percent) stated that high school personnel who had received conflict resolution training during 1992-93 received additional training in 1993-94. In addition to these school staff, other groups also received mediation or negotiation training--most notably, classroom teachers other than specialists (reported by 47 percent of responding schools) and assistant principals (44 percent). Other groups identified were guidance counselors (40 percent), new or additional specialists (28 percent), new principals (17 percent), security staff (9 percent), parents (6 percent), and other non-pedagogical staff (6 percent). Nine percent of the schools said specifically that none of these groups had received training in conflict resolution.

FACTORS FACILITATING PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Survey findings indicated that among the factors that school administrators and specialists believed contributed most to the successful implementation of the program were the support of the

administration and faculty, student willingness to "buy into" the program and promote it, the commitment of the peer mediators, and the availability of the specialists. Other reasons included good public relations and publicity, having a designated room for mediation, and excellent training. The clearest contributor to success seemed to the enthusiastic support and competence of those involved with it:

- "It's based on volunteerism and a willingness on the part of students and staff to make this program a viable part of the school community."
- "The personnel assigned to Conflict Resolution are the key to the continued success of the program--both have demonstrated the ability to communicate and educate the students."
- "The willingness of the administrative staff to allow the program in the classroom and allowing students time to take training as peer mediators and to participate in outside events with students from other schools."
- "The main contribution has been the success of the mediators and how students who have gone through mediation have spread the word to other students."

FACTORS IMPEDING PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

The major impediments to program implementation were lack of space and time, an insufficient number of people in school trained in mediation and negotiation, budgetary restrictions, lack of staff referrals, the difficulty of integrating conflict resolution within the regular curriculum, and the negative and violent conflict resolution styles that permeate students' lives outside the school and to which they have grown accustomed. Ways in which these problems affected the program's implementation are evident in the following explanations by respondents:

- "The Conflict Resolution program has been impeded by the inability to equip everyone in our school with the skills to resolve conflicts properly."

- "Sometimes no matter how much we advertise, classroom teachers do not refer enough cases to us....more funding has to be put into training teachers to recognize conflicts in a classroom before it becomes a dean's matter."

- "Mediations, at times, last very long; for the mediators who have no lunch period, it is hard to stop the mediation so that the mediator can return to class. It is also hard to go from one mediator to another so there are times when the mediator has to be excused from a class to complete a mediation."

- "Because of the limited funding we are not able to have the mediation center open all day."

- "Lack of space and a regular room have prevented a sense of 'ownership.' Peer mediators are not always available when the room is free."

- "We are still only one voice against a louder and more consistent voice in the lives of students. So many of our children are surrounded by and inundated with conflict resolution styles that are negative and violent...."

For alternative high schools and multi-site programs, and very large schools, lack of adequate funding or space for mediation centers, and fragmentation continued to be problems. (Schools that do not grant diplomas do not receive .2 positions for specialists.) To address some of these problems, schools were devising creative solutions: one very large high school enlisted the help of specialists from other high schools in its superintendency to provide a half day of training for all its staff; another planned to collaborate next year with a community-based organization also interested in promoting dispute

resolution, thereby augmenting the number of trained personnel available to the school.

## III. PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

### TRAINING OF PEER MEDIATORS

One OER survey question asked schools to assess how well prepared the peer mediators were to mediate disputes. On average, respondents gave them a rating of 4.2 on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1=poorly prepared and 5=very well prepared, a clear vote of confidence. According to the C.R.C.s, too, training and supervision of the peer mediators were going well. One observed that schools had recruited a broad base of mediators from all grades--many from negotiation classes--and that the attrition rate was generally low; another C.R.C. noted that some students were assisting with the training of other peer mediators. In one superintendency, the C.R.C. said that some schools had organized conferences to which guest speakers had been invited, and others had received grants to go on retreats which afforded uninterrupted time off-site for continued training experiences. In some cases, students participated in the training of adults, which, as one C.R.C. explained, "is good because they learn as they try to teach and share." Even schools which at first saw conflict resolution as "just another 'touchy-feely' program that would be here today, gone tomorrow," reported one C.R.C., "are making progress."

However, a major obstacle to training the peer mediators appeared to be scheduling. Problems included teacher resistance to releasing students, insufficient time during lunch periods,

and difficulty in scheduling training before or after school because some students travel from outside the borough. Some schools devised creative solutions to these problems, such as giving students course credit for mediation training, or paying students the minimum wage to attend training after school.

The peer mediators themselves credited the training they had received, and their own personal attributes and experiences with helping them to become good mediators. They emphasized roleplaying and practicing mediation skills, as well as a positive, caring attitude and good listening skills. One student observed that giving workshops about mediation for other students helped the peer mediators "to understand it better." Asked if there is anything about being a mediator that they needed more help with, several students mentioned conflict resolution techniques and methods, including negotiation skills and "understanding other people's views better." Some students, however, remarked that the availability of mediation services need to be more widely publicized; others noted the need for more mediators.

USE OF MEDIATION

About two-thirds of the schools reported that the mediation center was used more as a forum for conflict resolution in the spring 1994 than it had been during the fall 1993 semester. Among the reasons for this were greater awareness of the center, a well established referral process and, most significantly, the increased "buy-in" on the part of both school personnel and

students. Students' use of the center as a place to "talk, 'chill-out,' and settle disputes before they escalate," as well as self-referrals to mediation, were cited as evidence of their growing commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflict.

The C.R.C.s agreed that despite the limitations of time, funds, and space, most schools had fairly successful mediation centers. There were, however, notable differences in how they operated and to what extent. Most schools, according to one C.R.C., had empowered the peer mediators to hear cases, while some did not think students were ready to handle cases on their own (in these schools students observed adult-led mediations). In still other schools, peer mediators were involved in training others. Some centers had more referrals than they could adequately handle, while others were underutilized. Generally, schools with separate, well-equipped space functioned better than those that did not. Privacy, a sense of ownership, and ready availability of mediation services (e.g., center open all or most of the school day)--all important to program success--were fostered by the commitment of separate space dedicated solely to mediation. Some schools were also more inventive than others in finding ways to devise such functional space, as was demonstrated by one school which enlisted the help of the borough president's office in soliciting donations of furniture and equipment.

One measure of the success of the mediation center in one superintendency was the level of interest in conflict resolution expressed by other members of the school community who have

responsibility for school discipline: "Deans and security guards are now asking to be trained because they know it is better to defuse a situation than to get into power plays with kids--that self-discipline in better because it teaches kids how to listen and respect others' needs for space."

OER asked respondents how, if at all, their school has used peer mediation as an alternative to a principal's suspension. Their answers indicated that it is used in several ways:

- "Peer mediation is often viewed as a first alternative to suspension as long as no criminal act, such as weapons possession,. is involved";
- "Mediation is used <u>before</u> the conflict escalates in order to defuse the situation"; and
- "Mediation is used <u>after</u> suspension (usually when physical violence had been involved) in order to resolve the conflict before a student returns to school."

Some respondents said that potentially volatile situations have been defused and "suspendable offenses" avoided through peer mediation, which they perceived as an effective alternative to suspension largely because students came away from the experience with a better understanding of the conflict and their own role in it, as well as with a better sense of control in resolving problems. For some students, who don't really want to fight but can't resist the peer pressure to do so, mediation also served as a face-saving device. The avoidance of repeat conflicts was another benefit respondents attributed to mediation, and further attests to its importance as a learning experience. Some illustrative comments:

- "The disputants in many borderline cases who are involved in fighting for seemingly foolish reasons are able to fully understand their reasons for being in trouble more clearly with mediation than with a principal's suspension";

- "Students like feeling in control of resolving their own dispute in a safe, secure atmosphere where they can maturely discuss the issues that led to a conflict; the mediation center gives them a place where they can save face by resolving a conflict without resorting to violence--many kids fight only because they're afraid of being labeled wimps"; and

- "We feel that students who went into mediation were able to solve their conflict; these students have not gotten into any fights with each other and many have come back to the mediation center to solve conflicts with other students."

IMPACT OF MEDIATION ON SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS AND CLIMATE

Perceptions of School Staff

Using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means "very little" and 5 means "a great deal," schools assessed the program's impact. Their responses indicated that changes in attitudes and behavior were positive, overall. These included helping students to deal more effectively with conflict (mean rating=4.2), improving students' communication skills (4.1), increasing students' respect for people who are different from themselves (3.9), decreasing violence in school (3.8), and heightening school staff's understanding of students' needs (3.4).

Respondents to OER's survey cited various other ways in which the program has affected school climate, most notably by providing an effective, non-violent means of dealing with interpersonal problems; promoting a more collaborative, calmer school atmosphere; and fostering a heightened awareness of and

respect for differences. Because of the cooperative negotiation curriculum's emphasis on values, active listening, and understanding that differences don't necessarily mean disrespect, students, they asserted, are generally becoming more open and adept at communicating and dealing with their anger. Respondents also believed that school administrators and staff have begun to see mediation and cooperative negotiation as effective tools for resolving disputes between themselves as well as students. One respondent commented on the importance of this change in the attitudes and behavior of the adults in students' lives: "As students witness adults participating in this process of conflict resolution, they begin to see it as a realistic method of solving problems." That positive changes have begun to take place in the culture of the school as a whole--at least in some schools--is further suggested by the observation that "the spirit of the program has permeated the entire school structure." Further evidence of this is reflected in the claim that "the school now has a culture that includes resolving conflicts creatively, and negotiation and mediation skills are infused in many subject areas."

In response to a question asking them to describe a few of their most noteworthy experiences in overseeing the peer mediation center, the mediation specialists commented on the impact of the mediation experience on students' relationships and what they had learned. Some students, the specialists explained, learned that mediation was "a place where they could talk and

communicate their feelings," or that it was "a great way to defuse anger and conflict"; others, who had been friends, were able to renew friendships that were "endangered." One specialist reported that two students who had been "ready to kill each other," actually became friends subsequent to participating in a mediation together. Another disputant, as reported by one mediation specialist, has become an "unofficial mediator who keeps the peace in the hall" by getting students who are arguing to use the principles of mediation to settle their quarrel. For one mediation specialist, it was the content of one case involving prejudice on the part of one ethnic group toward other members of the same ethnic group (based on regional background) that was noteworthy.

Perceptions of the Conflict Resolution Coordinators

All of the C.R.C.s agreed that the program has positively affected the management of school-based conflict and school climate, overall. They cited changes in attitudes and behavior on the part of both students and faculty--e.g., heightened understanding of the causes of anger, recognition of the importance of communication to resolving differences, and greater inclination to talk things out than fight them out. The C.R.C.s also emphasized the importance of perceiving the program as an evolving process. Some comments:

- "The fact that we are seeing some faculty-student mediations indicates how adults are viewing their relation to kids. Kids learn that there is another way of handling differences of opinion....Some very cynical kids and adults have come 360 degrees. It's an ongoing process."

- "There is an increased buy-in on the part of kids, teachers, and administrators to try to talk things out. They see the importance of win-win resolutions. It's an attitudinal change that's hard to quantify."

- "The more I talk to kids, the issue of communication is becoming a part of their vernacular--they recognize the importance of this to solving problems; it's becoming instinctive to them, they're beginning to recognize the power of words."

- "Kids are beginning to question causes of anger and violence."

The observation of one C.R.C. highlights the magnitude of the program's goals and the effort required to achieve them. Reflecting on the program's positive impact on the management of conflict, he exclaimed: "It's been greater than I would have expected because we are trying to move a glacier. But, the structure is in place, the process is in place, and schools are dealing with conflicts in a collaborative way." While applauding the program's achievements, however, several C.R.C.s noted the importance of school-based support. As one coordinator put it, "Schools are receiving as much as they are putting into it."

Perceptions of Students

Peer mediators. The peer mediators agreed that the mediation center in their school had helped students to handle conflict better. One student observed that "students are not as quick to fight," while another claimed that "they learn to deal with problems themselves in a positive way." Other mediators, however, believed that some students went to mediation to avoid suspension or to solve a particular problem but doubted whether

they had learned much from the experience that would prove useful in the future.

The students also commented on how their experience as mediators has affected their own interactions with other people. Some reported that friends and other students ask them for advice on how to handle conflicts, that they have mediated disputes "informally," and that they themselves are "calmer." One peer mediator observed that "instead of seeing red, I can sit down and talk it out." Some respondents cited examples of working out conflicts with parents and teachers more effectively--e.g., "instead of screaming at my father, I keep repeating what I'm saying calmly until he 'hears' it." Teachers and parents, according to several mediators, have more respect for them [since they became mediators] and are proud of their achievement. Although not all students claimed success in applying their conflict resolution skills in their interactions with others, most seemed to try.

When asked to describe some of the most important things they had learned by being peer mediators, students referred to conflict resolution concepts and skills that were important to them both in their role as mediators and in their personal relationships. The former included remaining neutral, rephrasing what people say, and realizing that "people don't always say what they mean and vice versa," "there is [sic.] always two sides to a story," and "sometimes things happen that one party doesn't understand." Reflecting on their own lives, the peer mediators

noted learning "how not to be quick-tempered," "how to put yourself in others' shoes," "to avoid certain situations," and "having more options to deal with situations...[which] will go with you after high school to a workplace." As one mediator put it, "Being a mediator helps me to help others, but it also helps me to help myself."

Disputants. In explaining what they liked most about going to mediation, students talked for the most part about resolving problems peacefully, learning something valuable, and feeling better. Several credited mediation with keeping them out of trouble and helping them avoid suspension; one acknowledged that talking about a conflict with someone and solving it together had made it possible for them to "be friends again." Importantly, the remarks of several students indicated that mediation had given them a legitimate forum for solving problems without fighting, an option they really preferred but would otherwise have not have been able to take. As one student put it, "Without the crowd egging you on, you can talk about it [the conflict] directly." The mediation experience also provided students the opportunity to vent their anger in a constructive way and heightened their level of understanding: "All that anger gets released, you see the problem in a different perspective"; "by talking together we were able to find out more about the problem --it was like a social record of the problem"; and "one finds out more about the person with whom one was in conflict." Another student said simply, "You feel better afterwards."

Most of the disputants declined to identify anything about mediation that they didn't like, although several acknowledged that "some kids see it as a weakness [as opposed to fighting]." Some expressed not so much objections to mediation but difficulty in abiding by some aspects of the process: "It was hard to control myself when I was angry with the other person"; and "it was hard to listen all the time and not to speak out." One student was unhappy about missing classroom time.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of the disputants' endorsement of peer mediation as a means of resolving conflict is that they were unanimous in saying that they would recommend it to their friends; several, in fact, had already done so.

INSTRUCTION IN NEGOTIATION

Assessment by C.R.C.s

The responses of the C.R.C.s suggest that schools are implementing the negotiation piece in diverse ways, sometimes in various ways within one school. Among the instructional approaches were a one-semester class in negotiation that meets five times a week, several lessons within another course (often English or social studies), inclusion as a topic in freshmen orientation, and infusion into regular academic subject areas. One C.R.C. contended that the negotiation curriculum was the most important part of the program because "it really impacts on kids' lives, and unlike mediation, takes place over time and reaches more kids." However, as another C.R.C. noted, it "continues to be a challenge." Reflecting on how difficult it is to implement

the negotiation component, still another C.R.C. observed that it "involves retraining people, changing their perspective." His outlook was, nevertheless, optimistic: "Many now know what they don't know, and this is the first step in the battle."

Perceptions of Curriculum Students

Best aspects of lessons. In describing the best aspects of the lesson on cooperative negotiation, the curriculum students (who had received instruction in this curriculum but were not trained as peer mediators) typically commented on how the material was taught. This included roleplaying, student teaching, movies and stories (which made it "easy for us to learn"), and the number game (an exercise that promotes group cooperation adapted from a theater game). In addition, some students referred to what they learned--e.g., "I learned that whenever I'm faced with a conflict, I need to think first rather than get upset with the other person." The social dimension was important to other students: "The bonding in the class was great"; and "[I]n groups you can get to know other people well."

Worst aspects of lessons. Asked to explain the worst part of these lessons, most students responded, "nothing." However, for several students the most negative aspect of this instruction was dealing with issues and emotions that made them uncomfortable, such as racial conflict and family violence, and people's expressions of strongly held different points of view. Some telling examples: "The black and white issue--tension, embarrassment, guilt. You can feel it in the class"; "talking

about violence in the family, racial slurs, gender clashes--it gets very emotional, people start crying...."; "misunderstanding on the part of students, such as a discussion of differences between spanking and abusing a child"; and "differences of opinion clashing." Clearly, for many students the issues dealt with in lessons on conflict and cooperative negotiation were emotionally charged experiences, and perhaps for this reason, important opportunities for learning.

Value of instruction. In describing some of the important things they had learned from lessons on conflict resolution, the students referred to specific concepts or strategies such as distinguishing between their own and other people's needs and positions, understanding and having respect for different points of view, the importance of communicating, the difference between "good" and "bad" listening, and how to use the "I" and not "you" statements in order to avoid attacking the other person.

There was overall agreement among them that lessons on conflict resolution have helped students in the school to understand conflict better and deal with it more effectively. As they themselves explained:

- "It makes students think another way that they might not have thought of; they have learned avoidance, diffusion, and confrontation, and the differences among them."
- "When someone is faced with a conflict, he can think back to what he learned in class; he can speak in a conciliatory voice rather than jumping to conclusions."
- "Violence is not the first resort. Talking is better than arguing, but arguing is better than fighting."

- "Communication is the number one thing."
- "It helps them to be more open."

The curriculum students interviewed agreed that all students should receive these lessons, primarily because they believed that it would help to prevent violence. One student noted the importance of students learning to "handle problems for themselves"; another believed that instruction in conflict resolution should be a graduation requirement, explaining that "it changes you so much." Another student's poignant reflection on the value of this instruction is powerful testimony to the impact it can have on the lives of young people: "If I didn't take this course I'd be out on the street with the hooligans. It got me more involved in student government. It should be mandatory in the freshman year. If it were, those hooligans wouldn't be out there."

Impact on interpersonal relationships. To ascertain the impact of conflict resolution instruction on students' lives, one series of questions asked them to describe in what ways, if any, they have used what they learned in the classroom in their interactions with other people. In describing interactions with friends and other students, family members, and teachers, students cited numerous ways in which they have begun to incorporate some of the concepts and strategies of negotiation and dispute resolution. Among these were listening more and criticizing less, making others aware of their needs and feelings, and lowering their voice and asking others involved in

a dispute to do likewise. One student reported successfully negotiating an agreement with one of her teachers not to fail her in math (she had missed several weeks of school), but to tutor her after school. She explained that she would not accept being failed and continued to express her concerns. (She passed the course!) Another student related an episode in which a misunderstanding between a group of black and white students from different schools on a leadership program trip resulted in "a lot of anger and hurt feelings...and some kids making racial comments" until he made the students aware of the problems that led to the misunderstanding. "After that," he said, the rest of the trip was positive. By the second trip we were all hugging. We didn't separate racially. It was much better."

Some students reported serving as mediators in disputes between their friends or relatives, such as encouraging the potential combatants to explore with each other the reasons underlying their conflict. One student explained how he helped to prevent a fight: "A boy was telling me how he was going to hit this girl for saying things. I called him over to the girl and told him to talk it out with her. It was good because he found out it was just a misunderstanding."

AWARENESS OF PROGRAM BY SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means "not at all aware" and 5 means "very aware," schools rated the level of awareness of the peer mediation center on the part of various groups . Deans, guidance counselors, assistant principals, security staff, and

classroom teachers (not including mediation and negotiation specialists) received mean ratings greater than 4, indicating generally high levels of awareness. Students other than mediators and parents were perceived as being somewhat less aware (3.9 and 3.1, respectively).

Most of the disputants (10 out of 13) said that they knew that there was a peer mediation center in their school before they used it to resolve a problem, although one reported having only a "vague idea that it existed, but...didn't think anyone went to it." The other three respondents had not heard of it prior to their own experience with it. A majority of the peer mediators (N=11), however, thought that most of the other students in their school are aware of the center and generally think peer mediation is a good way to solve conflicts, primarily to avoid fighting or suspension. Several mediators, however, observed that some students "think it's needy...[and] would rather fight, while others have reservations about it because they believe "the confidentiality level is not high."

SUPPORT FOR PROGRAM BY SCHOOL COMMUNITY

According to respondents of OER's survey, support for peer mediation as a vehicle for resolving school conflict among various members of the school was generally high. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates lack of support and 5 indicates a high level of support, school administrators and staff received mean ratings of 4 or higher; the means ratings for students (other

than peer mediators and parents) were lower (3.8 and 3.6, respectively).

The mediation specialists indicated that other members of the school community (including supervisors, teachers, guidance counselors, security guards, and custodians) are interested in and supportive of the program. Such interest has been demonstrated primarily by referrals to mediation and requests for conflict resolution training. One specialist said that teachers approach her and ask that she talk to certain students, or leave notes about problems with students in a suggestion box. Principals' support generally took the form of allocating additional funds for an expanded specialist position (allowing the specialist to devote more time to the program), and providing time for other faculty to participate in staff development. Parents, as a whole, were less involved, although one specialist said that parents sometimes participated in mediations when disputes involved problems at home. That some of those teachers (including deans) who were initially "leery of the program" or thought of it as "just another quick fix that would soon go away" have subsequently expressed interest in conflict resolution training suggests that recognition of the program's value is evolving.

The negotiation specialist, who teaches negotiation lessons as part of the leadership class, explained that elected student government officers and captains of student clubs and teams are required to take the class, but that the remainder of the

students are "non-traditional leaders." Candidates are recommended by guidance counselors, teachers, and parents, but students have the option of not taking it. Often students who have taken the class previously (students can take it more than once) assist in teaching it. The popularity of the course would seem to be one measure of the level of interest in cooperative negotiation on the part of students and staff.

For the most part, the peer mediators believed that other students in their school respect their role as mediators, although some respondents acknowledged that such support was not universal. Some students, they contended, "like to see a fight," or think being a mediator "is nerdy." Interestingly, the mediators observed that students who do have respect for them are those who know about mediation, understand what it is, or have actually participated in the process and see "that we can handle situations and help them come to a resolution of their conflicts." One student asserted, "As a mediator you must demand respect"; another observed that "students tease me for going the route of mediator, but they respect me."

Schoolwide support for the program, according to the C.R.C.s, was largely dependent on the extent to which the principal and superintendent demonstrated their commitment to it. In schools where it was clear that conflict resolution was a priority and "not an add-on, but part of the educational process," and where support was visible--e.g., principals found space for the mediation center, gave students permission to

participate in WNYE telecasts on short notice, released specialists to attend offsite training--the program tended to flourish. In one superintendency where several schools got additional (discretionary) money for conflict resolution training, for example, more teachers volunteered than could be accommodated. Several C.R.C.s believed, however, that with time those people who have not bought into the program will do so. As one C.R.C. explained, "Some people want things to happen quickly --these people have trouble with conflict resolution; also those who have trouble with affective, 'touchy-feely' things have trouble with conflict resolution. What 'sells' the program is demonstrated success with kids." As another coordinator put it, "Last year was a start-up year; this year allowed people [who had not yet bought into the program] to see what they have--what grew out of the seed they planted." Plans for next year include developing strategies for schools where the support of the principal is weak.

The C.R.C.s acknowledged that some schools have tried--with varying degrees of success--to involve parents, but generally with "disappointing results." Some parents have attended workshops, sometimes in conjunction with meetings on multiculturalism or special education, or school P.T.A. meetings, but for the most part, they do not participate in conflict resolution activities. One C.R.C. suggested making greater use of the arts as a way of involving parents since they typically attend student performances.

Some schools have also begun to initiate efforts to involve the larger community in violence prevention, although this is not yet widespread. This has included, for example, in-school presentations by various community agencies on related topics (e.g., growing up bi-racial, problems faced by immigrants, dealing with anger, alcoholism); and discussions with local police, hospitals ("violence as a health issue"), court personnel, victims of violence, and members of the business community.

School-community collaborations to combat violence are also envisioned, including referrals by law enforcement officials to school-based mediation services, and coordination with community-based mediation services. One community organization, funded by the courts, will work with two schools next year to facilitate the mediation of disputes between students from different schools or that arise within the community. One C.R.C. reported that students have even received small grants from the business community to promote nonviolence.

In addition to encouraging community groups to take an active interest in the life of the school, schools have been promoting greater student involvement in the betterment of their communities. Student have, for example, participated in local conferences on nonviolence and made presentations on cable and network television about conflict resolution activities. One C.R.C. commented on the value to students of participating in building a better community: "It's important for kids to get

involved in issues--voter registration, HIV/AIDS prevention, gun control, lobbying, being connected to one another, having a safe place to attempt to be nonviolent." This sentiment was echoed by another coordinator who noted that the students who participated in conferences on nonviolence in their community "loved it," adding, "they felt like human beings."

SCHOOLS' SELF-MANAGEMENT OF PROGRAM

School Administrators and Conflict Resolution Specialists

OER's survey asked schools what would be necessary in order for them to successfully manage and sustain the program independently. Overall, respondents believed that more members of the school community needed to be familiar with and supportive of the basic concepts and strategies inherent in conflict resolution. To accomplish this, they argued, additional specialists and peer mediators would have to be trained on a regular basis, all students receive instruction in cooperative negotiation as part of their regular academic program, and training be extended to those members of the school community who were not involved as yet. Respondents also maintained that the mediation center should be operational throughout the school day. They seemed to be saying, in effect, that in order for the program to be sustained it had to become an integral part of school philosophy and practice. This, in turn, required additional funding, resources, and time.

Conflict Resolution Coordinators

While the C.R.C.s acknowledged that some schools have made progress toward managing the program independently, most believed that continued support was necessary. One coordinator explained that the program is not viewed by the superintendency as an "add-on" and that schools are not expected to implement it entirely on their own. Although individual schools train the student mediators, she continued, districtwide training is "much richer" and "exposes students to a wider group of their peers." The training of adults, she also believed, was "best done by someone outside the school" rather than by their colleagues. Another C.R.C. pointed out that ongoing turnover in personnel presents a continuing challenge to schools because the program is "heavily dependent on people trained in conflict resolution, but there is no existing knowledge base that is part of regular teacher training." Some coordinators believed that schools "need to feel that someone supports what they do," and that they have "someone in the superintendency who can address their problems." Other C.R.C.s thought that the level of a school's commitment to the program, and particularly the extent to which the principal considered it a priority, would determine whether or not the program continued without considerable outside support.

Asked what continuing assistance, if any, schools needed, the C.R.C.s referred to ongoing staff development and opportunities to interact with other professionals, diversity awareness training (necessary for violence prevention),

assistance in designing and programming negotiation instruction, and additional funds for more specialists and materials. Several C.R.C.s addressed the emotional needs of participants, as well, noting their "need to be nurtured, rewarded, and supported." Elaborating on this, one coordinator observed that "interacting with students around issues of conflict and anger is tiring, and teachers need care and support from care-givers." Another C.R.C. suggested that in a "bureaucratic organization" a sustained commitment (he suggested a minimum of five years) was needed in order to effect "cultural change" and for conflict resolution to become "standard operating procedure," an argument for continuing support from school administrators--e.g., "spending time with them, showing interest in them, being creative in freeing up time to attend training and other supportive meetings, getting materials, and making clear that the program is important."

MEASURES OF PROGRAM SUCCESS

School administrators, specialists, and the C.R.C.s agreed, overall, that the most important measures of program success were the level of commitment to conflict resolution demonstrated by the students and adults, and the positive ways in which it has affected their lives. They cited a reduction in the number of suspensions and physical fights, an increase in the number of students who seek out mediation as a way of dealing with conflicts and preventing the escalation of violence, more effective use of communication skills to resolve conflicts on the part of students exposed to the negotiation curriculum, and

generally a more peaceful school atmosphere characterized by greater cooperation and tolerance.

The fact that majorities of respondents to OER's survey judged the attrition rates of mediation specialists, negotiation specialists, and peer mediators to be low (74 percent, 64 percent, and 55 percent, respectively) would appear to be another measure of program success, especially since problems such as scheduling conflicts rather than lack of interest were the reasons why participants dropped out of the program.

Commitment to the program on the part of the specialists and peer mediators was based not only on their belief in the value of conflict resolution, but on their personal sense of accomplishment and pride in helping to bring about positive change. As one respondent said, "Students who become peer mediators enjoy the label of peacemakers of the schools and are inspired by the positive momentum. They're tired of cynicism and violence, and welcome feeling part of something so idealistic and positive." The sense of belonging to a special group, of being a part of a "family" in which students develop close relationships with adults and other students was part of the appeal of being part of the program. Explaining for themselves what they liked most about being a peer mediator, the students who were interviewed for this evaluation talked about helping others to solve problems without fighting, feeling proud of doing something positive, and finding satisfaction in being a role model and having the respect of others. Several also commented on making

new friends, helping to give their school a better reputation, or learning something valuable--e.g., "learning for yourself how to control your temper." Revealing, too, was the fact that all of the students wanted to continue being peer mediators despite some problems and disappointments. These centered largely around scheduling and other time-related difficulties, not being taken seriously by disputants (either because the peer mediators were younger or because the disputants had a negative attitude toward mediation), and having to live up to other people's expectations --e.g., "other kids expect a lot from us," and "showing a good example all the time.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### TRAINING AND SUPPORT

In light of the program's emphasis during 1993-94 on helping schools to become more independent in managing conflict effectively and encouraging the institutionalization of cooperative negotiation, training efforts focused both on providing continuing support to those participants (mediation and negotiation specialists and peer mediators) first involved with the program in 1991-92, its first year of operation, and familiarizing other members of the school community with the program and the basic principles of conflict resolution. Accordingly, the C.R.C.s, under the direction of O.G.S.S., undertook a wide range of activities, including the organization and conducting of training for additional or replacement specialists, assistant principals of guidance, and parents; on-site visits to schools to meet with the specialists, provide materials, and make presentations at staff and Parent Teachers Association meetings; leading workshops and informal discussions with superintendency-level staff; and enlisting the participation of community groups concerned with the prevention of violence. Importantly, they saw themselves largely as educational leaders, and encouraged school staff to initiate their own staff development activities and student participation in training and promotional activities.

Training and supervision of the peer mediators, primarily the responsibility of the mediation specialists, were going well, according to the C.R.C.s, although scheduling continued to be a major obstacle. Some schools dealt with the problem by giving students course credit for mediation training or paying them the minimum wage to attend training after school.

MEDIATION OF DISPUTES

Various kinds of conflicts, except for those involving weapons, drugs, or physical injury, were mediated during the 1993-94 school year, usually the same day they occurred or the next day. These included disputes revolving around reputation or gossip, disrespect or name-calling, boyfriend/girlfriend arguments, and racial/ethnic issues. According to the vast majority of schools, the mediations resulted in written or verbal agreement, which the disputants abided by. For the most part, the disputes were between individual students or groups of students, although some did involve students and school staff, students and parents/guardians and, to a limited extent, school staff. On average, a majority of the students who had been trained as mediators actually had the opportunity to mediate a dispute. Several findings point to an evolving commitment on the part of both school staff and students to the mediation process as means of resolving conflicts. Among these were student self-referrals to mediation; disputants' reports of positive experiences with peer mediation, which included coming to understand the underlying causes of conflict and having a say in

how their differences with others are resolved; interest on the part of staff responsible for school discipline in receiving conflict resolution training; and use of the mediation center by students as a place to talk and "chill-out" before disagreements escalate into violence. In addition, the fact that some schools used peer mediation to prevent a conflict from escalating into a principal's suspension or to ensure that a dispute that resulted in a suspension does not erupt again, is further evidence of growing respect for the process.

Nevertheless, there were important differences in how the mediation centers operated and to what extent. Generally, schools that had separate, well-equipped space functioned better than those that did not. Privacy, a sense of ownership, and the ready availability of mediation services--all important to program success--were fostered by the commitment of a separate space dedicated solely to mediation.

NEGOTIATION INSTRUCTION

Most schools reported that their goal was for all students ultimately to receive instruction in cooperative negotiation; as of March 1993, most schools reported that instruction had been provided to some ninth and tenth grade students, and about half of the schools had provided instruction to students in the eleventh and twelfth grades. On average, schools reported that during the spring 1994 semester approximately one-fourth of all students received instruction. The mean number of lessons was 12, although the number ranged widely across schools, and in most

schools, one or two individuals assumed responsibility for teaching them. While many specific topics were emphasized in teaching this curriculum, they comprised four major categories: understanding the nature of conflict; effective communication; values and concepts; and strategies for resolving conflict and alternatives to violence. Lessons on multiculturalism and cultural diversity were typically incorporated, and students were afforded opportunities to put into practice the conflict resolution strategies they were learning. For many students the issues addressed in these lessons, which frequently involved roleplaying and animated discussions, were emotionally engaging and, perhaps for this reason, important opportunities for learning.

According to some C.R.C.s, instruction in cooperative negotiation is particularly important because, unlike mediation, it continues over an extended period of time and has the potential for having an impact on the lives of many students. They also acknowledged, however, that this component is difficult to implement, in part because it entails changing the way people think.

PROGRAM IMPACT

All participants believed that the program has had a positive impact on personal relationships and school climate, overall. Cited were improvements in the way students deal with anger and resolve conflicts, heightened respect for differences, better communication skills, and increased understanding of

students' needs on the part of school staff. Some people noted that the school atmosphere was calmer and more collaborative. Peer mediators, disputants, and students who had participated in lessons in cooperative negotiation all commented on positive changes in their own interactions with others, both within and outside of school. Most telling, perhaps, was that disputants had enthusiastically recommended peer mediation to their friends, and curriculum students believed that all students should be required to take lessons in conflict resolution. Importantly, too, some students acknowledged that often students really don't want to fight, but feel that they have to in order to "save face." Peer mediation, they explained, offers them a legitimate alternative--grounds for optimism despite the fact that some students still view going to mediation as sign of weakness.

PROGRESS TOWARD SELF-MANAGEMENT

That schools were developing a sense of program ownership and the capacity to implement it more independently were suggested by several findings: the increased level of support for conflict resolution on the part of administrators and staff, evidenced for example by more referrals to mediation and principals' allocation of discretionary funds for expanded specialist positions; greater "buy-in" on the part of students, reflected in self-referrals to mediation and use of the mediation center as a place to talk and "chill-out" before problems escalate into violence; heightened interest on the part of various groups of school personnel in conflict resolution

training, including teachers, supervisors, guidance counselors, deans, security guards, and custodians; and the involvement of the peer mediators in the training of adults and other students.

Importantly, however, not all schools exhibited the same level of progress and, according to the C.R.C.s, even those that had made considerable progress toward self-management needed to be "nurtured, rewarded, and supported." In addition to schools' need for continued assistance with specific program-related activities, several C.R.C.s, observing that dealing with young people around issues of conflict and anger is exhausting, commented on teachers' need for emotional support. Further, in order to effect the magnitude of change required for conflict resolution to become part of the culture of the school, some C.R.C.s contended, a sustained commitment on the part of school administrators and the superintendency is necessary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings presented in this report, OER makes the following recommendations:

- Efforts to provide mediation and cooperative negotiation training to more members of the school community should be continued in order to promote the effective use of conflict resolution strategies in a wider variety of personal interactions and relationships.

- Staff development in the integration of conflict resolution concepts into subject-area instruction should be extended to as many teachers as possible, as a way of reinforcing the underlying principles and, perhaps, enlivening academic topics by engaging students more emotionally in the educational process.

- Activities directed at publicizing and promoting conflict resolution should continue to involve the

specialists, peer mediators and former disputants, but also extend the opportunity to other staff and students as a way of promoting their sense of involvement in the program--an enterprise directed at positive change.

- Principals should continue to support the program actively--e.g., by encouraging students and staff to use mediation as a means of solving conflict, facilitating attendance at mediation and negotiation training activities, securing private space for the mediation center, exploring creative solutions to scheduling and programming problems, and otherwise facilitating its operation.

- Efforts directed at encouraging cooperation between schools and the larger community--e.g., law enforcement officials, health agencies, and local businesses--to promote the prevention of violence should, to the extent possible, be expanded.